

1990

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Recommended Citation

Labelle, Marie (1990) "Unaccusatives and Pseudo-Unaccusatives in French," *North East Linguistics Society*. Vol. 20 , Article 3.

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UNACCUSATIVES AND PSEUDO-UNACCUSATIVES IN FRENCH

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I will propose an analysis of the inchoative verbs denoting a change of state in French. These verbs can be divided into three classes. With some verbs, the inchoative meaning is realized by a superficially intransitive construction only, as in (1):

- (1) a La neige fond
'The snow melts/is melting'
- b *La neige se fond
'The snow melts/is melting'
- c Other verbs: cuire 'cook', grandir 'to grow', maigrir 'to grow thinner', moisir 'mold', rouiller 'rust', vieillir 'to age', etc.

In the second class are verbs whose inchoative meaning can only be expressed by a reflexive construction, as in (2).

- (2) a *Le vase brise
'The vase breaks/is breaking'
- b Le vase se brise
'The vase breaks/is breaking'
- c Other verbs: s'abêtir 'turn into a moron', s'agrandir 'become bigger', s'alléger 'become lighter', s'alourdir 'become heavier', s'amaigrir 'become thinner', s'améliorer 'improve', se calcifier 'calcify', se civiliser 'become civilized', se couvrir 'become covered', s'engourdir 'become numb', s'enkyster 'encyst', s'humidifier 'become humid', se lignifier

'become wooden', se nuancer 'nuance', se poisser 'become sticky', se rabougir 'shriveled up', etc.

In the third class (3) are verbs entering both constructions rather easily:

- (3) a Le vase casse
'The vase breaks/is breaking'
b Le vase se casse
'The vase breaks/is breaking'
c Other verbs: aigrir 'turn sour', caraméliser 'caramelize', cristalliser 'cristallize', durcir 'harden', élargir 'widen', enfler 'swell', épaissir 'thicken', gonfler 'inflate', noircir 'blacken', plier 'fold/bend', rougir 'redden', rétrécir 'get narrower', etc.

Studies on these inchoative uses tend to consider that neither the intransitive nor the reflexive inchoative construction is totally productive and that the choice between them has to be lexically specified for each verb (Ruwet 1972, Grimshaw 1982). Here, I will propose an analysis of both constructions that enables us to actually predict which verbs belong to which lexical class.

Various studies on English have shown that the verbs denoting a change of state generally enter the two constructions illustrated in (4): a transitive construction and a superficially intransitive one having an inchoative meaning.

- (4) a John breaks the vase
b The vase breaks

Since work by Perlmutter (1978), it is generally accepted that the superficially intransitive construction is in reality unaccusative, as in (5):

- (5) Δ break the vase

The semantic rationale for this is that the subject of the superficially intransitive construction has the same theta-role as the object of the transitive construction.

Adopting this approach would lead us to treat both the intransitive and the reflexive constructions of French as unaccusative. However, I will argue that an unaccusative analysis for the intransitive construction in French is problematic on both syntactic and semantic grounds. I will show that while the reflexive construction is unaccusative, the intransitive construction is unergative and that systematic differences in use between the two constructions correlate with this distinction.

2. Syntactic facts

Consider first the syntactic behavior of the two constructions.

It is a well-known fact that, in French, unaccusative constructions are distinguished from unergative constructions by taking auxiliary être instead of avoir

and by entering naturally into an impersonal construction. Examples of this are given in (6) and (7).

- (6) a Unergative: Jean a téléphoné (**avoir**)
'John has phoned'
b Passive: La pomme est mangée par Jean (**être**)
'The apple is eaten by John'
c Unaccusative verb: Jean est arrivé (**être**)
'Jean has arrived'
- (7) Que s'est-il passé? ('What happened?')
a Unergative: *Il a téléphoné un homme
'It called a man' = A man called
b Passive: Il a été vendu beaucoup de crème à la glace
'It was sold a lot of ice cream'
c Unaccusative verb: Il est arrivé trois hommes
'It arrived three men' = There arrived 3 men

A third phenomenon which has been brought up by Pollock (1985:298) is the fact that unaccusatives enter the construction illustrated in (8), where the unaccusative is the infinitival object of *croire* 'believe' and its internal argument is relativized Le livre que je croyais avoir été acheté par Pierre. Unergatives are excluded from this construction¹:

- (8) a Unergative: ?*L'homme que je croyais avoir téléphoné
'The man who I thought to have telephoned'
b Passive: Le livre que je croyais avoir été acheté par Pierre
'The book that I thought to have been bought by Pierre'
c Unaccusative: L'homme que je croyais être arrivé
'The man who I thought to have arrived'

Turning to the inchoative constructions, we note that the reflexive displays the syntactic characteristics of an unaccusative. As illustrated in (9) and (10), it is constructed with auxiliary 'être', it enters an impersonal construction, and its argument can be relativized when it is embedded under 'croire':

- (9) a La branche s'est cassée (**être**)
'The branch SE broke'
b Il s'est cassé trois branches
'It SE broke three branches'
c La branche que tu croyais s'être cassée
'The branch that you thought to SE be broken'
- (10) a Le vase s'est brisé (**être**)
'The vase SE broke'
b Il s'est brisé plusieurs vases
'It SE broke many vases'
c Le vase que tu croyais s'être brisé
'The vase that you thought to SE be broken'

On the other hand, the superficially intransitive construction displays none of these characteristics, as shown in (11) and (12) (for similar examples, see Burzio 1986, Zubizarreta 1987). It shows the typical behavior of unergative verbs:

- (11) a La branche a cassé (**avoir**)
'The branch broke'
b *Il a cassé trois branches
'It broke three branches'
c Le vase que tu croyais avoir cassé
= the vase that you thought you had broken
'The vase that you thought to have broken'
- (12) a Marie a vieilli (**avoir**)
'Marie has aged'
b *Il a vieilli plusieurs personnes
'It have aged many persons'
c *La personne que je croyais avoir vieilli
'The person that I thought to have aged'
- (13) a La neige a fondu (**avoir**)
'The snow has melted'
b *Il_{impers.} a fondu de la neige²
'It melted some snow'
c *La neige que tu croyais avoir fondu
'The snow that you thought to have melted'

Thus, we are led to the conclusion that the intransitive construction is not unaccusative, but unergative.

3. Semantic facts

Correlated with this syntactic distinction are some systematic differences in use between the two constructions. Consider examples (14) and (15). Rothemberg (1974) has noted that the intransitive construction is used with entities which have inherent characteristics sufficient for bringing about the process denoted by the verb while the reflexive construction is the only one possible for entities having inherent characteristics which are insufficient for bringing about the process (cf. also Bernard 1971, Burston 1979).

- (14) a Jeanne rougit
a' *Jeanne se rougit
'Jeanne blushes'
b Il vit le mouchoir se rougir soudain
b' *Il vit le mouchoir rougir soudain
'He saw the handkerchief become suddenly red'
- (15) a Après l'extraction du nerf, les dents noircissent
a' *Après l'extraction du nerf, les dents se noircissent
After the extraction of the nerve, the teeth blacken
b Les murs près de la cheminée se noircissent (de suie)
b' *Les murs près de la cheminée noircissent (de suie)
The walls near the chimney are becoming black (from soot)

(14a), for example, denotes a process that takes place in and by the subject. The intransitive is used. The reflexive is impossible. (14b) denotes a change that is not internal to the subject but that affects it. In this case, the reflexive is used.

4. Transitive construction

A second semantic fact which requires an explanation has to do with the transitive use of the verbs under discussion. There is general agreement in the case of English that the semantic representation of the transitive construction corresponding to inchoative verbs is along the lines of (16), with the subject as an unspecified cause of a process which unfolds entirely in the object (Carter 1976, 1988), Davidson (1967), Dowty (1979), Hale and Keyser (1986, 1987), Lakoff (1977), Lyons (1963)).

(16) x cause (y come to be in state)

But Ruwet (1972b) has shown with examples such as the ones in (17) that in French the subject of the transitive construction must control directly and continuously the unfolding of the process. It cannot be a triggering cause.

- (17) a *Le colonel a fondu trois sucres dans son café
'the colonel melted three pieces of sugar in his coffee'
b Le chimiste (le métallurgiste) a fondu le métal
'the chemist (metallurgist) melted the metal'

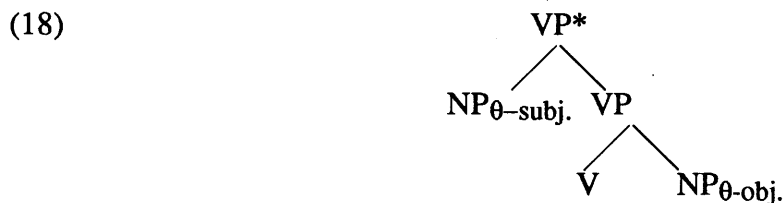
The impossibility of (17a) results, according to Ruwet, from the fact that the melting of the sugar cannot be attributed to a direct action of the colonel whose responsibility is limited to putting the sugar in his cup of coffee. The process of melting is autonomous. By contrast, in (17b), the chemist controls the process directly and continuously; the metal has no autonomy in this case. It is presented as purely passive.

Summarizing, verbs denoting a change of state in French require us to account for the difference in use and in syntactic behavior of the intransitive and reflexive constructions, as well as for the restrictions on the subject of the transitive construction.

5. Analysis

The analysis which I propose to account for these facts crucially relies on the hypothesis that there is a strict correspondence between the argument structure of lexical items and their conceptual structure.

I will first assume, as in Kuroda (1986), Koopman and Sportiche (1987) and many others, that the arguments selected by a lexical item are projected in syntax inside the maximal projection of this lexical item, as illustrated in (18):



The deep structure of the extended VP is a direct projection of the Predicate-Argument Structure of the verb which, itself, reflects its conceptual structure.

I will then adopt the hypothesis given in (19):

- (19) Unless otherwise indicated, a verb denoting an event will project a VP that will be predicated of the entity that is crucially responsible for bringing the event into existence.

It is important to note that (19) applies specifically to events, and not to states. This hypothesis makes the predictions in (20):

- (20) a The thematic subject of the verb is the argument which is presented as actively responsible for the unfolding of the event.
b An argument which is implied in the event but which is not actively responsible for the unfolding of the event is a component of the internal structure of the event, and, as such, it is a thematic object.

Let us now see how we can account for the facts under study.

Consider first the verbs which enter into the intransitive construction, that is, the verbs of the classes in (1) and (3), like fondre 'melt' and casser 'break'. I propose that these verbs are basically single argument verbs denoting a change of state, whose semantic representation is of the type given in (21):

- (21) x 'change'
(where 'change' means roughly 'undergo a change of state' (Hale and Keyser (1987)))

Relying on an observation made by Guerssel (1986), I will assume that a change of state can be conceived of either as taking place autonomously or as being brought about by some external factor.

If the process is viewed as taking place autonomously, the entity undergoing the change is conceived of as being both the motor and the locus of the change. It is seen as crucially responsible for the change. Therefore, it qualifies as a thematic subject and the Predicate-Argument Structure of the verb will be as in (22), where the lower case indicates that the representation is a lexical, pre-syntactic, representation:

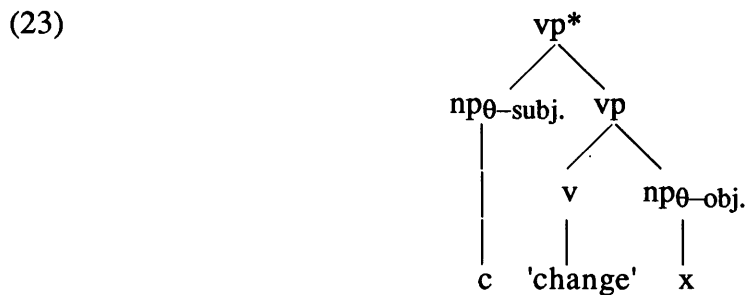
- (22)
-
- ```

graph TD
 vp_star[vp*] --- np_theta_subj[npθ-subj.]
 vp_star --- vp[vp]
 np_theta_subj --- x[x]
 vp --- v[v]
 v --- change[change]

```

(22) will result in the unergative construction, as in (1a) and (3a) la neige fond, la branche casse.

Let us now turn to the case where responsibility for the change is denied to the entity that undergoes it. That entity is presented as the locus of the change, but not as the motor, or controller, of the change. It is a passive participant in the process. Therefore, it does not qualify as a thematic subject, but it will appear as a thematic object. Moreover, since the entity undergoing the change is denied responsibility for it, some external circumstance is conceptually postulated as being responsible for it. Thus, the Predicate Argument Structure of the verb, which, I assume, is derived from its conceptual structure, is as in (23), where 'c' represents the external circumstance:



If, in (23), the circumstance is expressed, the result is a transitive sentence.

The inchoative reflexive is derived from (23). For reasons of time, I will not go into a detailed discussion of the inchoative reflexive. I will simply assume, as in most current analyses, that 'se' acts somewhat like the passive morpheme by 'absorbing' in some way the thematic subject (cf. Grimshaw (1988), Marantz (1984), Wehrli (1985), Zubizarreta (1987)). The result of this absorption is that the reflexive construction is an unaccusative construction, the subject position being dethematized.

This analysis thus accounts for the difference in syntactic behavior of the intransitive and reflexive constructions.

It also accounts for the systematic difference in use between them noted by Rothemberg and illustrated in (14) and (15). Since, in the intransitive construction, the subject is presented as actively responsible for the process, it must have inherent characteristics sufficient for bringing it about.

This analysis also finds confirmation in more subtle contrasts between the two constructions, having to do with the aspectual focus of the constructions. The intransitive construction states what the subject does. So, one can say that it focusses on the process itself. In contrast, the reflexive construction states what is happening to the object. Thus, it focusses on the result of the process.

- (24) Intransitive construction: focusses on the process itself.  
 Reflexive construction: focusses on the result of the process.



For example, the examples in (25) show that although gonfler and se gonfler are possible, only se gonfler accepts a complement introduced by de, meaning 'from'.

- (25) a Le ballon gonfle depuis cinq minutes  
 b Le ballon se gonfle depuis cinq minutes  
 'The balloon is inflating since five minutes'  
 c \*Le ballon gonfle de gaz carbonique depuis cinq minutes  
 d Le ballon se gonfle de gaz carbonique depuis cinq minutes  
 'The balloon is inflating from carbon dioxide since five minutes'  
 (Zribi-Hertz 1986:345)

According to Zribi-Hertz, the intransitive is incompatible with a complement introduced by de. In fact, this is not quite true, as shown in (26):

- (26) Marie rougit de honte  
 Lit.: 'Marie reddens from shame' = Marie blushes from shame

The complement introduced by de is excluded with the intransitive only when it denotes an entity responsible for actualizing the process, as in (25c), since in this case it contradicts the meaning of the construction which states the autonomy of the process. In (26), the shame is a psychological emotion which triggers a physiological reaction, but it does not control it. The process is seen as resulting entirely from Marie's physiology, which is identified to Marie herself.

The difference in the aspectual focus of the intransitive and the reflexive constructions can also be observed (27) and (28). The verbs in these examples normally reject the reflexive construction. But this construction, which focusses on the final state, can sometimes be licensed by markers of perfectivity like the Passé Composé in (27d) and the Passé Composé coupled with the perfective adverbial in exactly 30 minutes in (28d). The durative adverbial during 3 hours in (28f) does not license the reflexive.

- (27) a Son état empire / empirait  
 b \*Son état s'empire / \*s'empirait  
 'His/her state of health is worsening / was worsening'  
 c Son état a empiré  
 d Son état s'est empiré  
 'His/her state of health has become worse'
- (28) a Le poulet a cuit  
 b \*Le poulet s'est cuit  
 'The chicken has cooked' = is cooked  
 c Le poulet a cuit en très exactement 30 minutes  
 d Le poulet s'est cuit en très exactement 30 minutes  
 'The chicken was cooked in exactly 30 minutes'  
 e Le poulet a cuit pendant 3 heures  
 f \*Le poulet s'est cuit pendant 3 heures  
 'The chicken was cooked during 3 hours'  
 ((c) to (f): Zribi-Hertz 1986:344)

Conversely, (29) shows that the reflexive is incompatible with the expression mettre quelque chose à..., meaning "to put something on/up to...", which focusses on the beginning of the process:

- (29) a Le cuisinier a mis le sucre à caraméliser  
 b \*Le cuisinier a mis le sucre à se caraméliser  
 'The cook put the sugar on to caramelize'  
 (Zribi-Hertz 1986:346).

Summarizing, the proposed analysis accounts not only for the syntactic behavior of the two constructions, but also for systematic and often quite subtle differences in use between them.

6. Semantic restrictions on the subject of the transitive construction

This analysis also predicts that, since triggering causes, as opposed to actualizers, are not responsible for the unfolding of the process, they will not be able to appear in subject position, as noted by Ruwet for (17a).

Also, this analysis claims that the semantic role of the argument of the reflexive construction is similar to that of the object of the transitive construction, since in both cases it is not responsible for the process. But it differs from that of the subject of the intransitive construction, which is responsible for the process. Compare (30) and (31).

- (30) a L'oiseau a mué sous l'effet du virus  
 b \*L'oiseau s'est mué sous l'effet du virus  
 The bird moulted under the effect of the virus  
 c \*Le virus a mué l'oiseau  
 'The virus moulted the bird'
- (31) a \*L'oiseau a mué en un monstre à cinq têtes sous l'effet du virus  
 b L'oiseau s'est mué en un monstre à cinq têtes sous l'effet du virus  
 'The bird turned into a five-headed monster under the effect of the virus'  
 c Le virus a mué l'oiseau en un monstre à cinq têtes  
 'The virus transformed the bird into a five-headed monster'  
 (Zribi-Hertz 1986:334-335)

In (30), the virus caused the bird to moult. The choice of the intransitive is expected since although the moulting is triggered by the virus, it is a process which is carried to its term by the organism itself. In this case, the transitive and the reflexive constructions are impossible.

In (31), the bird underwent a complete transformation resulting from the action of the virus. Here, the virus is not simply a trigger, but it shapes the change and controls the particular result which will be obtained. The process is not autonomous. In this case the intransitive construction is impossible, but the transitive and the reflexive constructions are possible.

(32) and (33) show a further difference between the intransitive and the reflexive which is explained by this analysis:

- (32) a Le tissu rétrécit  
The fabric shrinks  
b Le tissu se rétrécit  
The fabric becomes narrower
- (33) a \*La route rétrécit  
The road shrinks  
b La route se rétrécit  
The road becomes narrower

When the fabric shrinks, as in (32a), the change is autonomous even if some additional factor like heat must trigger a reaction within the fabric. Since the road does not shrink, (33a) is impossible.

On the other hand, (32b) and (33b), with the reflexive, do not describe a process at all. They imply a comparison between two points in space of the entity and the observation that, at the second point considered, the entity is narrower than at the first point. Thus, for the reflexive to be possible, it is not necessary for there to be a physical process affecting the entity. It is sufficient that the final state considered (in time or in space) differ from the initial state, as long as the entity in subject position is not actively bringing about the change.

As predicted, the transitive construction, in (34), cannot mean that Jean causes the fabric to shrink. It can only mean that Jean takes some scissors and cuts the fabric. The object of the transitive verb is presented as undergoing a change of state, but without having any responsibility in the change.

- (34) Jean rétrécit le tissu  
'Jean makes-narrower the fabric'

Thus, whenever the entity is actively responsible for the change, it is a thematic subject. Whenever it is passively implied in the change, it is a thematic object.

#### 7. The constructions in which the verbs will be able to enter

We are therefore in a position to predict the constructions in which the verbs will be able to enter. First, verbs denoting essentially autonomous processes, like 'melt', 'rust', 'grow', and other similar verbs, will normally enter only the intransitive construction. If they do enter a transitive construction, the use of the construction is very restricted, as in (17b), or the verb does not denote a real change of the object, but an apparent change, as in (35):

- (35) Cette robe vieillit Marie  
'This dress ages Marie'  
= This dress makes Marie look older than she is.

In both cases, the inchoative reflexive is excluded.

- (36) Le plomb se fond à une température élevée  
'The lead SE melts at a high temperature' = middle meaning only

- (37) Marie se vieillit  
 'Marie is making herself look older' (\*Marie is aging) = true reflexive

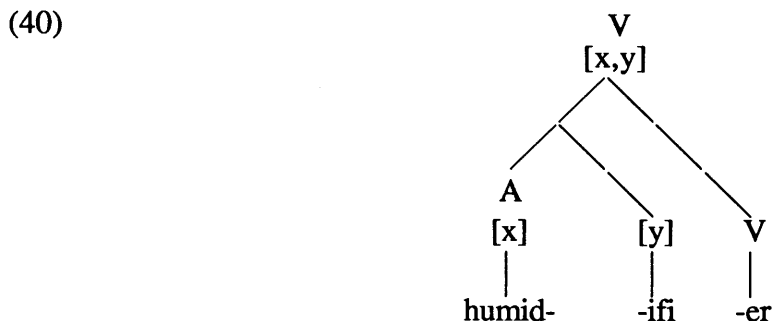
8. Verbs entering into the reflexive construction only

As for the verbs entering only into the reflexive construction, this analysis accounts for them if they are basically two argument verbs, and not single argument verbs like the previous ones. Given a transitive structure, an inchoative meaning can only be achieved by using the reflexive morpheme to absorb the argument corresponding to the thematic subject. Therefore the intransitive construction will not be possible for these verbs.

Support for the fact that the verbs in (2) are transitive comes first from the fact that this class includes all the verbs formed with the transitive affixes a-, as in (38), and -ifi-, as in (39).

- (38) abêtir (render unintelligent), agrandir (enlarge), alléger (make lighter), alourdir (make heavier), amaigrir (make slimmer), améliorer (improve), attendrir (tenderize), etc.<sup>3</sup>  
 (39) calcifier (calcify), diversifier (diversify), humidifier (humidify), lignifier (lignify), etc.

These verbs are formed from an adjective, a transitive affix, and a verbal suffix. The affixes introduce a second variable in the conceptual structure, on top of the variable associated with the adjective, as in (40), illustrating the verb humidifier (humidify):



The same can be said for the verbs created with the transitive prefix en-.

- (41) enkyster (encyst), engourdir (render numb)...

Other verbs of this class, although morphologically underived, are conceptually transitive in that they denote a change of one entity that is clearly due to a second entity: for example, the verbs couvrir 'to cover' and poisser 'to render sticky', which appear in the list in (2c), result from something covering the object. All these verbs are predicted to be conceptually transitive and to enter only the reflexive construction.

9. The difference between 'briser' and 'casser'

For some of the verbs of this class there is no obvious reason for them to be conceptually transitive. I will show, by discussing the difference between briser and casser, both meaning 'break', that this impression is probably due in most cases to our imperfect understanding the meaning of the verbs.

Consider first the verb casser, which enters both the intransitive and the reflexive construction. Examples (42) and (43) illustrate the fact that the process of casser takes place when some stress applied to a rigid or taut entity exceeds its capacity of resistance. The entities that casse (intransitive) have a limited capacity of resistance to stress and they actualize the process of casser by coming apart when this capacity of resistance is exceeded.

- (42) Ce fil de nylon est d'une solidité à toute épreuve. Il ne cassera que s'il a été soumis à une chaleur trop forte.  
'This string of nylon is extremely solid. It will break only if submitted to excessive heat'
- (43) Il a fallu l'application d'une force de 400 kg pour que cette corde casse.  
'It was necessary to use a 400 kg force in order that this string should break.'

Thus, we could give for casser the informal definition in (44):

- (44) casser : come apart under some kind of stress

In the case of briser, which enters only the reflexive construction, examples (45) and (46) show that it refers to an interruption of continuity rather than to a coming apart under stress.

In (45), briser is used with fluid entities. Casser is excluded from such uses, since the entities implied are neither rigid nor taut, and furthermore no stress is applied to them.

- (45) a Briser la monotonie  
Break the monotony  
b Briser l'ordonnance  
Break the organization/ the layout  
c Briser la continuité  
Break the continuity  
d Briser le flot des voyageurs  
Break the stream of travellers  
e Briser un entretien  
Break a conversation

In (46), briser, but not casser, is used when an interruption of continuity is achieved by a sudden change in the direction of the entity considered. Here again, no stress is applied to the entities.

- (46) a une ligne brisée  
a "broken" line = a line that makes an angle

- b ...et le vent qui se brisa à l'angle des ruines...(Robert 1985,II:185)  
the wind that broke (=suddenly changed direction) at the angle of the ruins
- c Architecture: comble brisé  
= roof presenting two different slopes
- d Brisure d'un volet  
= folding joint of a shutter
- e La lumière se brise au passage d'un milieu dans un autre  
= the light changes direction in going from one environment to another

Therefore, I propose for briser the informal and simplified definition in (47):

- (47) briser: (forcefully) interrupt the continuity/ integrity of

Thus, the verb briser makes reference to an interruption in continuity rather than to the act of coming apart. Whereas an act of coming apart can be conceived of as being autonomous, an interruption conceptually implies two participants: something is always interrupted by something else.<sup>4</sup> This conceptual dissociation between two participants leads to a conceptual structure having two variables. The result is that briser, as opposed to casser, cannot enter the intransitive construction.

The notion of conceptual dissociation between two entities plays a role in other cases where the reflexive is used. For example the verbs formed with the prefix auto, like 'auto-analyser', enter only the reflexive construction even if they already contain a reflexive morpheme, 'auto', and are therefore intrinsically reflexive:

- (48) a. Jean s'auto-analyse  
b. \*Jean auto-analyse  
'Jean self-analyses'  
c. Other examples: s'auto-critiquer (self-criticize), s'auto-détruire (self-destruct), s'auto-financer (self-finance)...

The reflexive clitic se is required by the fact that an analysis implies an entity doing the analysis and a conceptually different entity being analyzed. Even when the two entities are specified as being the same, they are conceptually dissociated. In this case, the conceptual structure contains two variables and the reflexive morpheme is obligatory. In other words, the morpheme 'auto-' does not affect the transitivity of the verb; it simply specifies that the referential value of the two variables is identical.

#### 10. Summary and conclusion

Summarizing, I have proposed that in the case of inchoative verbs, the intransitive construction, although it appears to be thematically unaccusative, is in reality unergative. The proposed analysis does not make reference to thematic roles. Rather, it makes crucial reference to the role of the entities in the event denoted by the verb in a particular context of use. The peculiar behavior of the intransitive construction with respect to unaccusativity had been noted by Burzio (1986) who suggested that the standard tests for unaccusativity do not always apply in French. The analysis which has been proposed here claims that these tests generally apply, but that the construction is a pseudo-unaccusative.

## Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> The verb disparaître seems to be a counter-example to this generalization, as shown by the following example, given as good by Pollock:

(i) L'homme que tu croyais avoir disparu

This verb, although it takes auxiliary avoir, seems to enter rather easily into the impersonal construction (Il a disparu plusieurs livres de la bibliothèque). The obvious questions raised by such examples, is the exact status of these tests for unaccusativity. See note 2.

<sup>2</sup> G. Legendre points out to me that Il a fondu beaucoup de neige is acceptable and that she also accepts La substance que tu croyais avoir fondu (corresp. to 13c). As for the last sentence, her judgement is not shared by a number of other speakers whom I have consulted. As for the first sentence, we know that unergative verbs can be found in an impersonal construction, although this construction is much more restricted in use with these verbs than it is with unaccusatives (cf. Il mange beaucoup de linguistes dans ce restaurant 'It<sub>impers.</sub> eats many linguists in this restaurant' (=Many linguists eat in this restaurant) from Grimshaw (1982); other examples can be found in Willems (1985), Zribi-Hertz (1982)). In view of the approach to subjecthood advocated in this paper, this raises the question of what kinds of semantic or discourse factors make it possible for a thematic subject to appear in post-verbal position in French. Notice that this post-verbal position could be the subject position of an inverted VP, rather than the thematic object position.

<sup>3</sup> I know of only two verbs prefixed with a- that can have an intransitive use: allonger in les jours (s')allongent (but not in other uses of allonger) and attendrir in la viande (s')attendrit dans la marinade. This, however could be due to a further extension of the verbs with a loss of the causative meaning of the prefix. Note that there is no verb \*longer corresponding to allonger and no verb \*tendrir corresponding to attendrir, while there is a verb grandir corresponding to agrandir or maigrir corresponding to amaigrir. When there exists an unprefixed verb, the prefixed verb can never enter an intransitive construction.

<sup>4</sup> Note that the existence of the noun auto-interruption is explained if an interruption is transitive, i.e. if auto- specifies the co-reference of the internal argument to the external argument (cf. the impossibility of having \*auto-éternement; \*auto-départ).

This paper was supported by grant # 410-89-1131 from SSHRC and by grant # 410-88-0624 (SSHRC) to the Argument Structure Project directed by A.-M. di Sciullo at UQAM. I wish to thank J.-M. Authier, D. Bouchard, A.-M. di Sciullo, J. Lumsden, and especially P. Hirschbühler for their comments and discussions on previous versions of this paper.

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